

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SCS-03 SCA-01 /054 W

----- 122024

O R 092330Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 585

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 2960

CORRECTED COPY: PREVIOUSLY RELEASED WITH SOME GARBLE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, HO

SUBJECT: CHURCH VIEWS ON FATHER CYPHER

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 2921

BEGIN SUMMARY: EMBOFFS SPOKE TODAY WITH SECRETARY TO ARCHBISHOP CONCERNING WHEREABOUTS OF FATHER CYPHER AND FINDINGS OF JOINT COMMISSION INVESTIGATING RECENT CLASH IN OLANCHO. HE STATED CHURCH NOW CERTAIN BOTH FATHER CYPHER AND WELL AS FATHER BETANCOURT AND HIS TWO COMPANIONS ARE DEAD. COMMISSION REPORT IS EXPECTED TO MAKE SAME CONCLUSION. CHURCH HIERARCHY ATTEMPTING TO MEET WITH CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR TODAY AND ANOTHER STATEMENT BY THE CHURCH IS EXPECTED TOMORROW. END SUMMARY.

1. POLOFF AND CONSOFF SPOKE THIS AFTERNOON WITH FATHER SANTA OLAYA, SECRETARY TO ARCHBISHOP SANTOS, ABOUT DISAPPEARANCE OF FATHER MICHAEL JEROME CYPHER AND GENERAL CONFIDENTIAL

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SITUATION RESULTING FROM RECENT EVENTS IN OLANCHO. HE STATED THAT CHURCH IS NOW CERTAIN THAT CYPHER IS DEAD. WORD THEY HAVE RECEIVED FROM SUPPOSED EYEWITNESS IS THAT FIVE CAMPESINOS WERE TAKEN FROM JAIL IN

JUTICALPA ABOUT 11:00 P.M. JUNE 25 AND SHOT ON OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN, THEY ARE SUPPOSEDLY BURIED BEHIND A BAKERY (NAMED SULA) WHOSE OWNER PARTICIPATED IN THE MURDERS. KILLINGS ARE SAID TO HAVE BEEN ORDERED BY PRISON COMMANDER WHOSE BROTHER WAS BYSTANDER KILLED DURING CLASH BETWEEN MILITARY AND CAMPESINOS THAT SAME DAY.

2. SANTA OLAYA ALSO CERTAIN MISSING COLUMBIAN PRIEST FATHER IVAN BETANCOURT AND ISU TWO FEMALE COMPANIONS WERE STOPPED SAME DAY BY A GROUP OF LANDOWNERS AND SUBSEQUENTLY KILLED. HE STATED HE HAS BEEN GIVEN MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF THEIR BURIAL.

3. FROM TALKS WITH CLERICAL MEMBERS OF JOINT COMMISSION, SANTA OLAYA BELIEVES THEIR INVESTIGATION IN WHICH MILITARY MEMBER LT COLONEL SUAREZ WILL CONCUR, WILL CONFIRM THESE REPORTS. HE ALSO BELIEVES COMMISSION WILL LAY BLAME FOR VIOLENCE AT THE CENTRO 18 DE FEBRERO ON LANDOWNERS RATHER THAN CAMPESINOS.

4. HONDURAN BISHOPS MET TOGETHER MONDAY AND TUESDAY AND MEETING AGAIN TODAY TO DETERMINE CHURCH'S ACTION. ARCH-BISHOP SANTOS HAS REQUESTED MEETING WITH CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR TODAY BUT NOT YET GRANTED AS MELGAR IS PREPARING FOR CENTRAL AMERICAN CHIEFS OF STATE MEETING IN SAN JOSE TOMORROW. SANTOS OLAYA EXPECTS ANOTHER PRONOUNCEMENT BY CHURCH TOMORROW.

5. COMMENT: IF JOINT COMMISSION REPORT DOES STATE THESE PRIESTS KILLED, GOVERNMENT ALMOST CERTAINLY WILL HAVE TO ACT AGAINST PERSONS INVOLVED. THIS COULD BE HIGHLY EMBARRASSING SITUATION

SINCE, IF REPORTS ARE TRUE, LOCAL MILITARY AUTHORITIES INCLUDING OLANCHO COMMANDER MAJOR JOSE ENRIQUE CHINCHILLA, SON OF MINISTER OF DEFENSE, IMPLICATED IN AFFAIR. DEPARTMENT ALSO SHOULD BE GIVING THOUGHT TO WHAT ACTION EMBASSY SHOULD TAKE ON MURDER OF U.S. CITIZEN.
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